

INDIANAPOLIS, IND.
NEWS

e. 169,001

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Date: SEP 18 1964

EDITORIALS

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CPYRGHT Neutralization?

As the Vietnamese war drags on, the American people begin to get edgy and confused.

What purpose is the Johnson administration pursuing in this conflict? To win, to achieve stalemate, or to negotiate the country into "neutralization," after the pattern established in Laos?

Sen. Barry Goldwater has suggested the administration may have a neutralization program up its sleeve. If so, this would be the equivalent of delivering the country, and all of Southeast Asia, into the hands of the Communists.

This would be a poor conclusion indeed to a long and costly war in which American lives and treasure have been freely dispensed. Needless to say, the Johnson administration has shunted aside suggestions that it does intend neutralization. Yet no clear statement has been forthcoming as to just what its intentions are.

Against that background, a high-level report emanating from the Central Intelligence Agency is worth reading. This paper, written by Willard Matthias of the CIA's Board of National Estimates, gives a highly pessimistic view of the Viet Nam crisis, confirming charges that the administration's war has gone badly. The paper, according to board chairman Sherman Kent, "has general board approval."

In this important CIA paper, Matthias states concerning Viet Nam:

"The counter-guerilla effort continues to flounder, partly because of

the inherent difficulty of the problem and partly because Diem's successors have not yet demonstrated the leadership and inspiration necessary. There remains serious doubt that victory can be won, and the situation remains very fragile.

"If large-scale U.S. support continues and if further political deterioration within South Viet Nam is prevented, at least a prolonged stalemate can be attained. There is also a chance that political evolution within the country and developments upon the world scene could lead to some kind of negotiated settlement based upon neutralization."

Is this what the Johnson administration has in mind? Continued fighting by American soldiers to achieve a "stalemate"—to be followed by another "negotiated settlement" ending in "neutralization"? Is this what the administration's Vietnamese war is aimed to achieve? If so, the American people who have been told that this was a war to stem the tide of Communism and to protect the free world have been badly misled.

The public is entitled to some straight talk about Viet Nam. Does this high-level CIA paper represent official policy in the Johnson administration? Does President Johnson agree with the conclusions which have met with "general board approval" in the highest intelligence office in his administration? The country needs answers to these questions, and needs them soon.